

## MIDI files for singers: a rough guide

### What is MIDI Technology?

**M**usical **I**nstrument **D**igital **I**nterface is a type of computer file that represents music in digital form and allows you to play music. MIDI files provide a common file format used by most musical software and hardware devices to store song information including the title, track names, and most importantly what instruments to use and the sequence of the musical events needed to play back the music. Almost every music sequencer is capable of loading and saving standard MIDI files, which are not like pre-recorded music (such as MP3) – since they merely contain codes that instruct your computer to play itself – more like the old pianola player-piano rolls. MIDI files are far smaller than audio files, and can easily be sent as email attachments. They carry no danger of virus infection.

### MIDI for singers

MIDI files (\*.mid) are very useful to singers, particularly for choral and ensemble works. Together with a score, they provide a very fast way of learning parts. The crucial difference between them and ordinary audio files is that, if you have a suitable 'player', you have control over what you hear – you can slow them down, speed them up, choose which part you want to hear, and even how each part sounds.

### Using MIDI files for practice

MIDI files are best used for practice with the printed score. In learning a new piece, you will probably want to hear your own part more clearly. You can change it to a clearer sound, and turn its volume up above the other parts. You can then play the piece (or any section of it) at a comfortable tempo while you learn the part. Later, you may wish to reverse the process: making your part hardly audible while you fill it in against the other voices, and going up to performance speed.

### Playing MIDI files

Most computers will play MIDI files "out of the box", using the software already there, ( e.g. MSN Media Player, which is provided by default with Microsoft Windows XP), but this will NOT give you control over individual parts. You need to download a MIDI-playing program that will give you the control you need. The one strongly recommended is the **Van Basco Karaoke Player**, which is freeware, and quite easy to use. Just Google "Van Basco" to find it or go to <http://www.vanbasco.com>.

### The Van Basco Karaoke Player

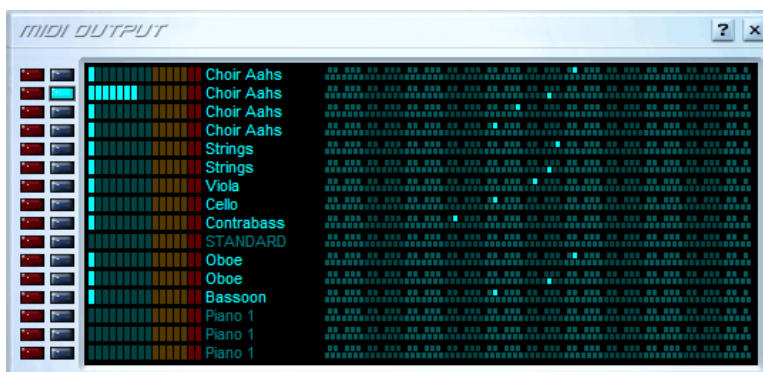
(Forget the "karaoke" idea – as some MIDI files contain song lyrics, which can be displayed, live, they are excellent for that type of singing. Choir singers will *not* need on-screen lyrics!)

The main Van Basco window looks like this:



You click "Playlist" to choose the file you want, and the blue buttons control the playback as you might expect. You can create your own playlist from the MIDI files that you have downloaded. (If you download your MIDI files into the same folder as the player program this will simplify matters.)

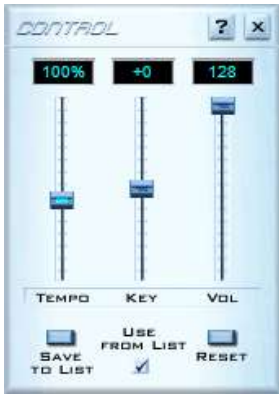
If you click "Output" you get this window:



Each part has a separate line. The red buttons mute tracks – the blue buttons make them louder than the others. In this example, the alto part is emphasised.

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If you click "Control" it shows you this:



Here you can alter the tempo and the overall volume (altering "key" would be cheating!). You can save your settings if you want to.

The Van Basco help screens are excellent, and explain all the other features of the program.

### **How to get MIDI files**

Many thousands of MIDI files are freely available on the internet. Since they are neither performances nor printed scores, there are few if any copyright problems, and downloading them is not regarded as piracy. The oldest and most important collection for choral singers is called "The Silvis Woodshed", where you can find most of the major oratorios and very many other vocal works. There are now other large collections, and individual files can often be found by Googling the composer or title together with the word "MIDI".

### **The Silvis Woodshed.**

This site is accessed at <http://gasilvis.net>

There is a list of thousands of MIDI files arranged alphabetically by composer.

Having identified the musical item you want, single click on the title when one of 3 things will happen dependent on the file's origin.

- You may be offered the choice of 'Open' or 'Save'. Click on 'Open' to play it, click on 'Save' to download to your computer, when you will be asked where you wish to save it (e.g. to a 'My Music' folder on your C drive).
- You may be redirected to an affiliated website, but playing or downloading should still be possible, just follow the screen instructions.
- You may see a loudspeaker symbol. To download, it may be necessary to RIGHT click the symbol, and then **left** click in the options box on 'Save target as...' . Your PC will ask where you want to store it, when you tell it, it will download.

### **Specific Works of interest to WCS Members.**

For your convenience, this website contains a link to another MIDI file site : [John's downloadable Midi File Choral Music site](#). To access, just click on the LINKS window on the HOME page, and then, in the list displayed, on [midi files](#). Many files on this site are voice-specific, that is, the voice part selected will already be enhanced for you.

### **Acknowledgment.**

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